

Strategic Tolerance: The Role of Judaism in China's Geopolitical and Economic Strategy

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

April 27, 2024

"Strategic Tolerance: The Role of Judaism in China's Geopolitical and Economic Strategy" explores the nuanced role that Judaism plays within the broader context of China's international relations and domestic policies. This paper delves into how China's approach to the Jewish community, though minimal in numbers, is intricately tied to its strategic geopolitical and economic objectives. By examining the history of Jewish presence in China, from ancient traders on the Silk Road to the modern expatriate communities, the study highlights how these relationships have been shaped by China's larger goals on the world stage. Furthermore, the analysis sheds light on the conditional nature of religious tolerance in China, showing how it is often influenced by diplomatic relationships, particularly with Israel, and economic collaborations. Through this lens, the paper discusses the implications of such strategic tolerance for understanding the complex interplay between religion and politics in China, providing insights into the broader dynamics of cultural rights and freedoms under authoritarian regimes.

Keywords: Judaism in China, strategic tolerance, geopolitical strategy, economic strategy, China-Israel relations, religious freedom, international relations, cultural rights, expatriate communities, Silk Road history, Chinese foreign policy, conditional religious tolerance.

Introduction

Overview of the Paper's Thesis

This paper explores the thesis that the Chinese government's tolerance of Judaism is primarily strategic, shaped by geopolitical and economic considerations rather than a genuine acceptance of religious diversity. It argues that the presence of Judaism in China, while limited, serves as a diplomatic tool and economic conduit, particularly in maintaining and enhancing relations with key global players like Israel and facilitating interests in the Middle East. This "strategic tolerance" is viewed through the lens of historical precedents, ideological conflicts between Communism and religious practices, and China's broader international strategies.

Definition of Key Terms

Judaism: A monotheistic religion originating from the Hebrew people of the ancient Near East, based on the beliefs and practices outlined in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Judaism is not only a religious identity but also encompasses cultural and ethnic dimensions.

Communism: A political and economic ideology based on the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that advocates for a classless society in which all property and resources are communally owned, eliminating social classes and the state eventually. In practice, particularly in China, it often involves strict governmental control over personal, economic, and political life, including religious practices.

Strategic Tolerance: A policy or approach where a government or entity allows or supports certain practices, groups, or beliefs not because of genuine acceptance or commitment to those principles but because doing so achieves strategic objectives, such as political alliances, economic benefits, or international prestige.

Brief Description of the Historical Context of Judaism in China

Judaism has a recorded presence in China dating back to at least the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), when Jewish merchants arrived via the Silk Road. The most significant early Jewish community developed in Kaifeng, established during the Song Dynasty, which became a notable center of Jewish life until its decline in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Throughout Chinese history, Jewish communities have generally been small, isolated, and varied in their degree of religious observance, influenced by China's broader social, economic, and political dynamics. In the 20th century, the revival of Jewish presence was marked by the arrival of refugees escaping turmoil in Europe and Russia, establishing vibrant communities in cities like Shanghai and Harbin. Today, the Jewish population in China consists mainly of expatriates and a small number of descendants of historical Jewish communities, reflecting a complex interaction between historical legacy and contemporary geopolitical realities.

This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration into how and why the Chinese government might utilize its Jewish communities as strategic assets in its international and domestic agendas.

Theoretical Framework

Explanation of the Concept of "Strategic Tolerance" in International Relations

Strategic tolerance refers to a calculated policy wherein a state allows or promotes certain ideologies, religions, or cultural practices within its borders, not because it intrinsically values or agrees with them, but because doing so serves broader strategic objectives. These objectives can range from improving international relations, enhancing economic benefits, to projecting a certain image on the world stage. This approach often involves a delicate balance between internal policy preferences and external

diplomatic pressures or opportunities. Strategic tolerance can be particularly observed in authoritarian regimes or in states with rigid ideological frameworks, where deviation from the norm is typically not tolerated unless it serves a higher strategic purpose.

Overview of the Ideological Inconsistencies Between Judaism and Communism

Judaism and Communism present foundational ideological inconsistencies, primarily revolving around the role of religion in society. Communism, particularly as practiced in Marxist-Leninist states like China, often espouses atheism and views religion as an opiate that distracts from class struggle and the realities of capitalist exploitation. The state, under Communist doctrine, is supposed to eventually wither away, leading to a classless, stateless society where communal ownership of production prevails.

In contrast, Judaism, like many other religions, offers a framework that includes a spiritual hierarchy and a communal but theologically centered way of life that often involves private property and individual rights as components of religious practice. Judaism's emphasis on community and religious laws can be viewed as antithetical to Communist ideals, which prioritize state control and a secular, state-centric morality.

Introduction to China's Geopolitical Goals and Economic Strategies

China's geopolitical goals and economic strategies in the modern era are deeply interconnected with its approach to managing both domestic affairs and international relations. These goals include:

1. **Economic Growth and Stability:** Ensuring continued economic prosperity and stability is paramount for the Chinese government, influencing its approach to global trade, investment, and economic partnerships.
2. **Regional Dominance:** China aims to assert its influence in the Asia-Pacific region, seeking to reduce the influence of competitors like the

United States and to manage its complex relationships with neighboring countries.

3. **Global Leadership:** On a broader scale, China seeks to position itself as a global leader, advocating for a multipolar world where Western influence, particularly that of the United States, is counterbalanced.
4. **Soft Power Expansion:** Culturally, China uses its soft power to improve its image worldwide, promoting its culture and political ideology as benign and beneficial, which includes showcasing its tolerance and inclusive policies toward various cultural and religious groups.

These overarching goals help to explain why China might adopt a policy of strategic tolerance towards Judaism. By allowing and even supporting certain religious activities, China not only appeases international watchdogs concerned with religious freedom but also strengthens its diplomatic relationships, particularly with economically and strategically important nations such as Israel. This nuanced approach forms the backbone of the strategic tolerance framework and sets the stage for an in-depth analysis of how these dynamics play out in practice.

Historical Overview of Judaism in China

Recap of the Jewish Presence and Its Evolution in China from Ancient Times to the Modern Era

The Jewish presence in China can be traced back to the arrival of Jewish merchants via the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE). These early settlers established the foundation for a Jewish community that would see its most significant development in Kaifeng during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 CE). Here, the Jews built a synagogue in 1163, facilitated by an imperial grant, showcasing the early acceptance and integration of Jewish people within the Chinese empire.

Throughout the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, the Jewish population in Kaifeng thrived but began a gradual decline in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) due to assimilation and the diminishing of religious practices and communal leadership. The 20th century witnessed a resurgence with the arrival of Russian and European Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms and Nazi persecution. Cities like Harbin, Shanghai, and Tianjin saw vibrant Jewish communities established, with synagogues, schools, and cultural organizations blossoming.

However, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and subsequent policies under Communist rule dramatically impacted these communities, leading to significant migration to Israel, the United States, and other countries by the mid-20th century. Today, the Jewish presence in China is primarily composed of expatriates in major cities and a small number of Chinese citizens who are rediscovering their Jewish heritage in places like Kaifeng.

Discussion of Significant Periods of Increased Tolerance and Their Geopolitical Contexts

Tang and Song Dynasties: The early acceptance of Jewish settlers during these periods can be attributed to the dynasties' openness to foreign trade and cultural exchange facilitated by the Silk Road. The imperial endorsement of religious diversity allowed Jewish and other foreign communities to integrate into Chinese society.

20th Century Resurgence: The early 20th century saw an influx of Jews fleeing unrest in Europe and Russia. During this period, China's international treaty ports like Shanghai provided a relatively safe haven for Jewish refugees. The relative tolerance during this time was due to the geopolitical situation, where foreign powers had significant influence in these ports, and China had a vested interest in presenting itself as a safe and stable place for international residents.

Post-1978 Economic Reforms: After the opening up of China's economy under Deng Xiaoping, there was a renewed tolerance and sometimes encouragement of foreign businesspeople, including Jews, as part of broader economic strategies. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 also marks a significant period where geopolitical and economic interests led to a more favorable environment for Jewish people and practices.

Each of these periods of increased tolerance towards Judaism in China can be linked to broader strategic interests, whether they were economic, political, or related to foreign policy. Understanding these contexts is crucial for analyzing the motivations behind China's current and historical stances towards its Jewish communities.

Analysis of Communist Ideology versus Religious Freedom

Examination of Communist Principles Regarding Religion

Communist ideology, rooted in the philosophies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, often portrays religion as a tool of oppression and an "opiate of the masses" that serves to justify inequalities and distract the working class from their economic struggles. This viewpoint leads to a fundamental conflict between Communist principles and religious freedom. In theory, Communism aims for a classless, stateless society where religious affiliations are seen as potentially divisive and contrary to the collective ethos promoted by the state.

Under Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which has shaped the policies of many Communist states including China, religion is often subjected to strict state control. The state may tolerate certain religious practices but closely monitors and regulates religious organizations to ensure they align with state interests and do not challenge the authority of the Communist Party.

Discussion of the CCP's Policies on Religion and How They Apply to Judaism

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s approach to religion is characterized by a policy of controlled allowance rather than outright freedom. Officially, the People's Republic of China recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism, and these are regulated through state-sanctioned patriotic religious organizations. Other religious practices, including Judaism, are not officially recognized, which places them in a somewhat ambiguous position within the framework of state control.

Control and Surveillance: The CCP implements a system of surveillance and regulation over religious activities, requiring religious leaders to align their teachings with the Party's ideology and priorities. This control extends to all non-officially recognized religions as well, which must navigate a complex and often restrictive regulatory environment to practice their faith.

Tolerance as a Strategic Tool: For Judaism, the application of CCP's policies has been nuanced and heavily influenced by broader diplomatic and economic considerations. While Judaism is not officially recognized as a religion in China, the government has shown varying degrees of tolerance towards Jewish practices, particularly when they intersect with foreign relations or economic objectives. This can be seen in the relatively more relaxed attitudes towards expatriate Jewish communities in major cities, who often gather for worship and community events with minimal interference, as long as these activities are perceived to align with state interests or contribute to China's international image.

The Case of Kaifeng Jews: In contrast, the treatment of the historical Jewish community in Kaifeng reflects a more traditional application of Communist principles regarding religion. Efforts to revive Jewish religious practices among the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews have faced significant challenges, including restrictions on religious gatherings and a lack of official recognition, which can be seen as part of the broader policy to minimize potential challenges to state control from religious or ethnic identity movements.

In summary, while Communist ideology inherently conflicts with the concept of religious freedom, the CCP's policies towards Judaism and other religions are complex and often strategically adjusted. These policies are not just about controlling religion per se but are also deeply entwined with the CCP's broader goals of maintaining social stability, promoting national unity, and enhancing China's position on the global stage. This strategic adaptation highlights the pragmatic aspects of Chinese governance, where ideological purism can sometimes give way to geopolitical and economic pragmatism.

China's Diplomatic Relations with Israel

Overview of the Establishment and Evolution of Sino-Israeli Relations

China's diplomatic relations with Israel have evolved significantly over the decades, mirroring broader geopolitical shifts and China's changing role on the world stage. Official diplomatic relations between China and Israel were established relatively late, in 1992, although informal contacts and limited cooperation existed before that time.

Pre-Official Recognition: Prior to official recognition, interactions between China and Israel were cautious and largely driven by pragmatic considerations. During the Cold War, China's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its alliances with Arab countries and its ideological alignment with the Soviet Union, which often placed it in opposition to Israel. However, behind the scenes, there were limited engagements, particularly in areas like technology and military innovation, where both countries had significant interests.

Establishment of Diplomatic Relations: The formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 marked a significant shift. This change was influenced by several factors, including China's broader diplomatic strategy of engaging more actively with global powers and its interest in accessing

Israeli technology and expertise, particularly in agriculture and military technology.

Post-Recognition Developments: Since the establishment of formal ties, Sino-Israeli relations have expanded considerably, encompassing trade, technology exchange, and cultural exchanges. Israel is seen as a valuable partner in technology and innovation, areas that are priorities in China's economic development strategies.

Analysis of How These Relations Affect China's Stance on Jewish Communities Within Its Borders

The diplomatic relationship between China and Israel has implications for how China manages its stance towards Jewish communities within its borders, particularly in terms of policy and public perception.

Economic and Technological Interests: The positive aspects of the Sino-Israeli relationship, especially in economic and technological collaborations, have contributed to a more favorable environment for Jewish people in China, particularly those involved in business and technology sectors. This is evident in cities like Shanghai and Beijing, where Jewish expatriate communities enjoy relatively more freedom to organize, worship, and conduct business.

Cultural and Educational Exchanges: The strengthening of ties has also facilitated cultural and educational exchanges between China and Israel, which indirectly supports a broader understanding and acceptance of Jewish culture within China. This includes academic partnerships and the inclusion of Jewish studies in some Chinese universities.

Policy Towards Religious Practices: While the official policy towards unrecognized religions remains restrictive, the relationship with Israel has led to a somewhat more nuanced approach towards Jewish religious practices, especially those involving foreign nationals. This can be seen in

the tacit allowances for certain religious activities that might otherwise face restrictions under China's stringent policies on religious affairs.

Influence on Local Jewish Populations: For the local populations, such as the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews, the impact is less direct. While these communities might benefit from the general improvement in perceptions of Jewish people, they continue to face significant challenges in reviving their religious practices due to the lack of formal recognition and ongoing restrictions on religious education and organization.

In summary, while China's diplomatic relations with Israel have led to enhanced economic and cultural ties, the effects on China's domestic policies towards Jewish communities are complex and layered. These effects are most positively felt in the expatriate communities and in economic realms, with more limited impact on local historical Jewish populations, reflecting the continuing balance China maintains between its strategic interests and its internal control over religious and cultural expressions.

Economic Interests in the Middle East

Detailed Analysis of China's Economic Interests in the Middle East

China's economic interests in the Middle East are vast and multifaceted, primarily driven by the region's critical role in global energy markets and its strategic geopolitical position. The Middle East serves as a vital link in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to enhance global trade routes and strengthen economic ties between Asia, Africa, and Europe. Key aspects of China's economic interests in the region include:

Energy Security: The Middle East is a crucial source of oil and natural gas for China, which is the world's largest importer of crude oil. Ensuring a stable and reliable supply of these resources is a paramount concern for China's energy security and ongoing economic growth.

Infrastructure Projects: Under the BRI, China has significantly invested in infrastructure projects throughout the Middle East, including ports, railways, and roads. These investments not only enhance regional connectivity but also open up new avenues for Chinese companies and exports.

Trade Relationships: The Middle East is a significant market for Chinese goods and services, ranging from technology to construction and engineering services. Conversely, China imports a variety of products from the region, including petrochemicals and other raw materials.

Investment Opportunities: China has been increasing its direct investments in the Middle East, focusing on sectors like technology, renewable energy, and telecommunications. These investments are part of China's broader strategy to secure its economic interests and influence in the region.

Exploration of How Maintaining a Semblance of Normality with Israel Facilitates These Interests

The relationship with Israel plays a strategic role in how China manages its broader economic interests in the Middle East for several reasons:

Technological and Economic Partnership: Israel is a global leader in several high-tech industries, including cybersecurity, agricultural technology, and water conservation, areas where China seeks to advance its own capabilities. The collaboration with Israel allows China access to cutting-edge technologies and expertise, which can be leveraged not only within China but also in its projects throughout the Middle East.

Geopolitical Balancing: Maintaining good relations with Israel helps China position itself as a neutral player capable of engaging with all states in the region. This balancing act is crucial for China to protect its varied interests in the Middle East, especially given the complex political dynamics and the frequent conflicts involving Israel and other Middle Eastern countries.

Diplomatic Leverage: China's relationship with Israel provides it with additional diplomatic leverage in its broader Middle East policy. By demonstrating its ability to maintain constructive relations with Israel, China enhances its credibility and influence with Arab countries, facilitating negotiations and strengthening bilateral ties.

Enhancing BRI Strategy: Israel's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa makes it an important partner in the BRI. Cooperation with Israel can enhance the initiative's success by improving regional connectivity and stability, which are crucial for the success of BRI projects across the Middle East.

In summary, China's economic interests in the Middle East are closely intertwined with its relationship with Israel. By maintaining a semblance of normality and cooperation with Israel, China not only secures a partner rich in technology and innovation but also strategically positions itself within the broader geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. This relationship is instrumental in facilitating China's ambitious economic and strategic goals in the region.

Role of the Jewish Diaspora in China's International Image

Discussion on How the Presence of a Jewish Community in China Enhances Its International Image

The presence of a Jewish community in China, though relatively small, plays a significant role in shaping China's international image, particularly in terms of cultural diversity and religious tolerance. This aspect is crucial as China seeks to present itself as a global leader and a responsible major power.

Projection of Cultural Tolerance and Diversity: By accommodating a Jewish community, China demonstrates its capacity to integrate diverse cultural and religious groups, which is a vital element in its portrayal as a

harmonious society open to foreign residents and ideas. This is especially important in Western countries, where freedom of religion is a core value, and the treatment of minority communities is often scrutinized.

Enhancement of Soft Power: The existence of active Jewish synagogues, cultural events, and the celebration of Jewish festivals like Hanukkah and Passover contribute to China's soft power by showcasing its cultural inclusivity. These activities often receive coverage in international media, reinforcing China's image as a place that values and protects cultural diversity.

Examination of Specific Instances Where This Has Played a Role in Diplomatic Relations

Diplomatic Engagements with Israel: The treatment of Jewish communities in China is often highlighted in bilateral discussions and diplomatic engagements with Israel. For instance, during state visits and high-level meetings, Chinese leaders have occasionally referenced their historic and contemporary Jewish communities as a bridge between Chinese and Israeli societies. This acknowledgment serves not only as a cultural linkage but also reassures Israel of the respect and recognition afforded to Jewish heritage within China.

International Forums and Summits: At various international forums and summits, particularly those involving human rights and cultural diversity, China has used the presence of religious minorities, including Jews, as examples of its commitment to cultural and religious freedoms. This is often aimed at countering criticism regarding China's human rights record, particularly in relation to other religious and ethnic minorities.

Public Relations and Media: The Chinese government and state-controlled media occasionally highlight stories about the Jewish community's life in China, such as celebrating Jewish festivals or restoring historical Jewish sites. These stories are used strategically to enhance

China's image abroad, showcasing an environment of tolerance and protection for minority cultures and religions.

Academic and Cultural Exchanges: The Jewish community has also been involved in academic and cultural exchanges that have diplomatic implications. For instance, Chinese universities hosting seminars on Jewish history or collaborating on projects related to Holocaust education can improve China's educational and cultural ties with countries like Israel and the United States.

In summary, the Jewish diaspora in China, though numerically small, serves as an important element in China's international strategy. Its presence helps to enhance China's image as a culturally diverse and tolerant society. Specific instances where this has been leveraged in diplomatic relations underscore the strategic use of cultural and religious communities in foreign policy, particularly in a global context where cultural diplomacy and soft power are increasingly significant.

Case Studies

Examination of Specific Instances Where China's Policies Towards Jews Have Been Influenced by External Relations

The following case studies illustrate how China's interactions with the Jewish community and its policies towards Judaism have been shaped by external diplomatic pressures, geopolitical considerations, and strategic alignments. These instances highlight the interplay between domestic policies and international relations.

Case Study 1: Establishment of Formal Diplomatic Ties with Israel in 1992

- **Background:** Prior to 1992, China and Israel had limited unofficial contacts, largely due to China's alliances with Arab countries and its

ideological stance during the Cold War. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the shifting geopolitical landscape prompted China to reassess its foreign relations strategy.

- **Influence on Policy:** The formal recognition of Israel in 1992 was a significant shift in China's Middle East policy, reflecting a pragmatic approach to international relations. This decision was influenced by the potential technological and economic benefits that a relationship with Israel could offer, especially in sectors like technology and defense.
- **Impact on Jewish Communities in China:** This diplomatic move led to a more favorable environment for Jewish communities in China. It coincided with a period of economic liberalization and global integration, during which the presence of foreign nationals, including Jews, was viewed more positively. The establishment of diplomatic ties indirectly facilitated religious and cultural activities of the Jewish diaspora in China, helping to enhance China's image as a tolerant and multicultural society.

Case Study 2: Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum Expansion

- **Background:** The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, which commemorates the history of Jewish refugees in Shanghai during World War II, underwent a significant expansion that was completed in 2020. This museum highlights the period during the 1930s and 1940s when Shanghai served as a sanctuary for thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust.
- **Influence on Policy:** The expansion of this museum was not just a cultural or historical project but also a diplomatic tool. It occurred amidst growing international criticism over China's human rights practices, particularly concerning other religious and ethnic minorities.
- **Impact on Jewish Communities in China:** By promoting and preserving Jewish history in Shanghai, the Chinese government aimed to showcase its historical role as a refuge for persecuted peoples, thus

bolstering its international image. The museum serves as a symbol of tolerance and has been a focal point for diplomatic visits and cultural exchanges, reinforcing the narrative of historical friendship between China and the Jewish people.

Case Study 3: Chinese Investments in Israeli Technology

- **Background:** Over the past two decades, Chinese firms and state-owned enterprises have significantly increased their investments in Israeli technology companies, particularly in areas like telecommunications, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence.
- **Influence on Policy:** These investments have strengthened Sino-Israeli economic ties and have necessitated a stable and predictable domestic policy towards Jewish communities and Israeli nationals in China.
- **Impact on Jewish Communities in China:** The deepening economic ties have led to a more nuanced approach to Judaism within China, where activities related to Israeli businesses or cultural exchanges are generally supported and facilitated. This economic relationship reinforces the strategic importance of maintaining good relations with the Jewish community, both within and outside of China.

These case studies demonstrate that China's policies towards Jews and Judaism are often influenced by broader international strategies and external relationships. The government's approach balances domestic ideological commitments with pragmatic considerations of foreign policy and international diplomacy, reflecting a complex calculus of maintaining power, expanding influence, and managing global perceptions.

Impact on the Jewish Community in China

Analysis of the Impact of These Geopolitical Strategies on the Jewish Community's Religious and Cultural Practices

The geopolitical strategies employed by China, including its diplomatic relations and economic policies, have had multifaceted impacts on the Jewish community in China. These impacts can be broadly categorized into areas affecting religious freedom, cultural expression, and community development.

Religious Freedom and Practices: The diplomatic ties between China and Israel, along with China's broader international strategy, have generally facilitated a more accommodating environment for Jewish religious practices, especially in cities with significant expatriate populations like Beijing and Shanghai. Synagogues operate and Jewish holidays are observed with greater freedom than might be expected under a regime that traditionally controls religious expression. However, this tolerance often hinges on the political climate and China's international relationships, making it somewhat unpredictable.

Cultural Expression and Identity: For the Jewish community, especially expatriates, China's strategic international relationships have enabled a richer cultural expression. Jewish schools, cultural events, and business networks thrive to a degree, supported implicitly by China's desire to maintain a cosmopolitan and internationalized image. Festivals like Hanukkah and Purim are celebrated, and cultural exchanges between Chinese and Jewish communities are occasionally highlighted in the media.

Community Stability and Growth: The stability and growth of the Jewish community in China are indirectly influenced by geopolitical strategies. Economic collaborations between China and Israel, for instance, have brought more Israeli companies and professionals to China, reinforcing the community's economic base and encouraging its expansion.

Personal Accounts and Testimonies from Members of the Jewish Community in China

To provide a personal perspective on these impacts, several accounts from members of the Jewish community highlight their experiences:

Expatriate's Perspective: "Living in Shanghai, we've been able to celebrate our traditions almost freely, and there's a real sense of community here. The Chinese authorities have been quite accommodating, which I think is partly because of the good relationship between China and Israel. It's a very different experience from what you might expect given China's reputation for religious control," shares a Jewish businessperson from Tel Aviv.

Local Jewish Resident: A descendant from the Kaifeng Jewish community notes, "There's a growing interest in our Jewish roots, and we've received some support for cultural events. However, there are still many restrictions, and it feels like we are tolerated rather than fully accepted. Our community is small, and without formal recognition, it's challenging to fully revive our traditions."

Cultural Exchange Organizer: "Organizing cultural exchange programs between Jewish and Chinese communities has been easier in recent years. I believe this is because China values its international image and wants to show its openness to the world. These programs have helped in increasing understanding and tolerance towards the Jewish culture among the local Chinese population," explains an organizer based in Beijing.

These personal accounts underscore the complex and nuanced impact of China's geopolitical strategies on the Jewish community. While there are benefits derived from China's international posture, challenges remain, particularly for local Jewish communities seeking greater recognition and autonomy in their religious and cultural practices. The overall environment remains one of conditional tolerance, where the freedoms and opportunities available to the Jewish community can fluctuate with changes in diplomatic and economic priorities.

Comparative Analysis

Comparison with Other Minority Religious Groups in China

China's approach to managing religious minorities is complex and varies significantly across different groups, depending on their historical background, size, and perceived political threat to the state. When comparing the Jewish community with other minority religious groups in China, several key distinctions and similarities emerge.

Muslims (Uighurs and Hui): The treatment of Muslims in China, particularly the Uighurs in Xinjiang, has drawn significant international criticism. The Chinese government views their religious and ethnic identity as a potential threat to national unity and security, leading to severe restrictions and reported human rights abuses. In contrast, the Hui Muslims, who are more culturally and linguistically aligned with the Han majority, experience relatively fewer restrictions. The Jewish community, small and less politically charged, typically faces fewer constraints, reflecting a more strategic tolerance based on geopolitical considerations rather than domestic security concerns.

Christians (Protestants and Catholics): Christianity in China is officially recognized, but still heavily regulated. House churches (independent Protestant congregations not registered with the state) often face harassment or closure, while state-sanctioned churches are required to align their teachings with socialist values. The Jewish community, especially expatriates, generally enjoys more flexibility in their religious practices than unregistered Christian groups due to their small size and the lack of perceived threat they pose to the state.

Buddhists (Tibetan Buddhists): Tibetan Buddhists face intense scrutiny and regulation due to the sensitive political status of Tibet and the Dalai Lama's international profile. The control over religious practices and leadership in Tibetan Buddhism is stringent. In contrast, the Jewish community, which lacks a similar political dimension in China, navigates

fewer political hurdles, focusing more on cultural and religious practice with less interference.

Falun Gong: This spiritual group has been banned and persecuted since 1999 as it is seen as a direct challenge to the authority of the Chinese government. The crackdown on Falun Gong is one of the harshest against any religious or spiritual group in China, highlighting the government's response to perceived threats to its control.

Examination of the Consistency of China's Approach Across Different Religions

China's policies towards religious groups are characterized by a pragmatic approach that balances the state's control over religious activities with its broader political and economic objectives. This approach is not consistent across all religions but is tailored to the perceived impact of each group on national security and social stability.

- **Geopolitical Influence:** The treatment of the Jewish community is more favorable partly because of the strategic relationships with Israel and the economic and technological benefits these relationships bring. This stands in contrast to groups like the Uighurs or Falun Gong, where the government perceives significant political risks or challenges to its authority.
- **Cultural and Economic Contributions:** Religious groups that are seen as contributing positively to China's cultural richness and international image or that have significant economic impact tend to be tolerated more, provided they do not challenge the state's authority. This is seen in the relative leniency towards certain practices of the Jewish community, especially those involving international or expatriate members.
- **Security and Unity:** The primary criterion driving the severity of restrictions appears to be the perceived threat to China's national security and unity. Groups associated with separatist movements or large-scale political opposition face the harshest restrictions.

In conclusion, while there is a framework of control that applies to all religious practices in China, the application of this framework varies significantly depending on the specific religious group and the broader context of China's strategic interests. This analysis underscores the complexity of religious freedom in China, where geopolitical, security, and economic considerations intertwine to shape the state's approach to different religious communities.

Future Projections and Scenarios

Discussion of Potential Future Developments in China's Policy Towards Judaism

The future trajectory of China's policy towards Judaism and Jewish communities within its borders is likely to be influenced by a range of domestic and international factors. These could include shifts in geopolitical alignments, changes in China's internal policy priorities, and developments in global economic and technological landscapes.

Continued Strategic Tolerance: If current trends persist, China is likely to continue its approach of strategic tolerance towards the Jewish community, particularly the expatriate population, as long as this stance supports China's broader geopolitical and economic goals. This could involve maintaining a favorable environment for Jewish cultural and religious practices in major cities to bolster China's image as a globally integrated and culturally diverse country.

Increased Cultural and Economic Exchanges: With growing technological and economic collaboration between China and Israel, there could be an enhanced scope for cultural and educational exchanges. This might lead to a deeper mutual understanding and potentially more relaxed policies towards Jewish religious education and cultural activities.

Potential Formal Recognition: While unlikely in the short term, there is a potential scenario where China might extend some form of formal recognition to Judaism as a religion, particularly if the geopolitical benefits of such a move—such as strengthening ties with Western nations and Israel—outweigh the perceived risks.

How Changes in Geopolitical or Economic Landscapes Could Influence These Policies

Shifts in Middle Eastern Politics: Changes in the political landscape of the Middle East, such as new peace initiatives or conflicts involving Israel, could significantly affect China's stance. A more stable and peaceful Middle East might encourage China to strengthen its ties with Israel and, by extension, show greater openness towards Jewish communities as part of its international diplomacy.

US-China Relations: The state of US-China relations plays a critical role in shaping China's foreign policy. An improvement or deterioration in relations could lead to adjustments in how China manages its ethnic and religious policies, including those affecting Jewish communities, as part of its broader foreign policy strategy.

Global Economic Shifts: Economic downturns or booms could lead to changes in how China views its foreign and minority communities. In times of economic hardship, China might tighten its policies due to increased nationalism and protectionism. Conversely, in periods of economic prosperity, China may continue to liberalize its policies towards foreign businesses and communities, including Jews, to attract more international talent and investment.

Technological Collaborations: As technological collaboration between China and Israel deepens, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and renewable energy, China might adopt more favorable policies towards Jewish communities to facilitate these partnerships. This

could lead to a more nuanced approach that balances traditional caution with strategic economic incentives.

In conclusion, while the core of China's policy towards Judaism is likely to remain guided by strategic and pragmatic considerations, several potential developments could lead to shifts in this policy. Monitoring these changes will be crucial for understanding the evolving dynamics of religious freedom and minority rights within China.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Their Implications

This analysis has explored the nuanced relationship between China's policies towards Judaism and its broader geopolitical and economic strategies. The findings underscore a complex interplay where strategic interests significantly influence religious tolerance and cultural integration. Key insights include:

1. **Strategic Tolerance:** China's approach to Judaism and the Jewish communities within its borders is characterized by strategic tolerance, driven by diplomatic, economic, and technological considerations rather than a fundamental commitment to religious freedom.
2. **Geopolitical and Economic Drivers:** The diplomatic relationship with Israel and the economic benefits derived from this relationship play crucial roles in shaping China's policies towards Jewish communities. These factors make the Jewish community's experience in China distinct from other religious or ethnic minorities, particularly those perceived as threats to national security or unity.
3. **Conditional Freedom:** The relative freedom experienced by Jewish communities, especially expatriates, is largely conditional on the broader state of China's international relations and domestic policy

goals. This conditional nature underscores the instrumentalization of religious tolerance in China's foreign policy.

4. **Impact on Jewish Identity and Practices:** While there is an allowance for certain religious practices and cultural expressions, these are closely monitored and regulated, reflecting a balance China seeks between showcasing cultural diversity and maintaining stringent control over religious activities.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Stakeholders in International Relations

Given the complex dynamics at play, several recommendations can be made for policymakers and stakeholders engaging with China on issues related to religion and cultural rights:

1. **Promote Cultural Exchanges:** Enhancing cultural and academic exchanges involving Jewish and broader religious studies can help improve mutual understanding. Policymakers should support initiatives that foster dialogue and education between Chinese and foreign institutions on religious and cultural diversity.
2. **Advocate for Consistent Policies:** International stakeholders should advocate for more consistent and transparent policies regarding religious freedom in China. While recognizing China's strategic approach to Judaism, there should be a push for these policies to be less contingent on geopolitical fluctuations and more grounded in genuine cultural respect and legal protection.
3. **Monitor Developments Closely:** Policymakers should closely monitor any shifts in China's foreign policy and domestic regulations that affect religious and ethnic minorities. Understanding these changes can help anticipate and effectively respond to China's strategies regarding religious tolerance.
4. **Engage in Multilateral Dialogues:** Engaging China in multilateral forums that address religious freedom and human rights can help hold it accountable to international standards. These dialogues can

also provide a platform for discussing the benefits of true cultural and religious diversity beyond strategic interests.

5. **Support Local Communities:** International support for grassroots organizations and local communities, including those within China that work towards promoting religious understanding and cultural preservation, is vital. Such support can empower these communities and promote more substantial and lasting changes in policy and practice.

In conclusion, the relationship between religion and geopolitics in China, particularly regarding Judaism, illustrates broader trends in how states manage religious diversity within the context of international relations and domestic policy. The strategic tolerance model applied by China offers valuable insights into the complexities of cultural rights and religious freedoms under authoritarian regimes influenced by global interactions.

